



# News Release

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## **Economic downturn and recent lay-offs prompt Northern Maine Community College to offer special semester to accommodate displaced workers**

*Aroostook County* - Northern Maine Community College is taking a proactive step to provide opportunity and assistance to displaced workers in the region by offering an alternative semester with several scheduled credit courses set to begin early next month. The move is designed to accommodate workers, especially those in the forest products industry, most of which received lay-off notices in the days before or weeks after the traditional start of the spring semester in January.

“We see this as a critical step in helping these individuals get back on their feet and an important part of our work to retool and prepare northern Maine’s workforce to meet the region’s needs,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. “We have been working closely with the team at the local Maine CareerCenter and other organizations to make this happen. The alternative for many interested in exploring new career options through higher education would have otherwise been to wait until the start of the summer or fall 2009 semesters months from now. It was important for all involved that we respond quickly.”

That is especially true for the hundreds of workers who received lay-off notices from the various wood product mills in the region. Many of the individuals qualify for Federal Trade Adjustment Assistance through the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. From the time those impacted begin to draw down benefits, TAA offers up to 104 weeks, or two years, of occupational training and education assistance, with additional benefits provided if developmental courses are required.

“The CareerCenters in Aroostook County are currently working with all laid off workers from the Ashland area to access services. Northern Maine Community College has assisted in providing guidance to these individuals and retraining options to CareerCenter staff for post secondary education. This collaborative effort has assisted many laid off workers to efficiently move on to identify their next occupational path,” said Patricia Perry, manager of Aroostook County CareerCenter services.

The new NMCC semester, which is being coordinated through the Continuing Education Division at the College, gets underway on March 9. To date, 44 displaced workers have expressed interested in enrolling in a number of the course offerings that range from English composition to industrial safety. Other courses on the schedule include introductory classes in business and computer applications, elementary algebra, general psychology and a freshman seminar, which serves as an introduction to the college experience.

“When we were notified of the impending layoffs with some of the larger employers we knew it was time to begin planning for a large number of dislocated workers seeking retraining. There have been a number of these workers already accepted into two year degree programs – plumbing and heating, wind power technology, and electrical construction and maintenance seem to be the most popular requests for programs. Some of these workers have decided to seek shorter term re-training as commercial vehicle drivers or oil burner technicians—many of the training options available to them at NMCC are considered high wage/high demand jobs for Maine,” said Leah Buck, assistant dean of continuing education. “We are glad to be able to help these displaced workers to retrain for other careers.”

Buck adds that the course offerings are not limited to displaced mill workers or others affected by the economy – anyone who would like to enroll in these courses is welcome to apply. “It is a great opportunity for individuals who missed the January semester or someone who only needs one or two courses.”

In addition, the College, through its Academic Success Center and in cooperation with the SAD 1 and SAD 32 Adult and Community Education Programs, is offering several developmental course offerings and other assistance for students identified as needing remediation in areas identified on the College placement exam. The overarching goal is to get the students to complete courses, which are common in most academic programs, in the special and coming summer semester and get them on track to begin coursework in their selected program or major area of study when a new sequence begins in those programs this fall.

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